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ABSTRACT

Two hypotheses were tested investigating the relationship between beliefs and behaviors of teachers in controlling students and student perceptions of classroom excitement. It was hypothesized that direct relationships would exist between teacher strictness in beliefs and behaviors toward student control and the students' opinions concerning the level of drama or excitement in the classroom. Hypotheses were tested using a sample of 32 upper-grade elementary teachers and their students. It was found that teacher pupil control beliefs were unrelated to classroom excitement for the overall sample, but for female teachers, permissiveness in ideology was associated with excitement, while for males, strictness was associated with excitement. Overall, permissiveness in teacher pupil control behavior was related to excitement. This held strongly for female teachers, but did not reach significance for males. Thus both hypotheses were discarded as invalid. (Author/MJB)

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TEACHER PUPIL CONTROL IDEOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTAL ROBUSTNESS

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TEACHER PUPIL CONTROL IDEOLOGY AND
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A common complaint of students is that school is boring or monotonous. Elsewhere (1) we have pointed to the monotony reducing functions of athletics and the extra-curriculum in secondary schools, and of the elaborate activities held in elementary schools in connection with holidays like Valentine's Day, Halloween, and Christmas, not to mention such events as student birthday parties complete with home supplied cake, cupcakes, or cookies.

Schools and classrooms can be places of drama and excitement as well as boredom and monotony. However, explanations are lacking about the conditions under which such qualities can be found. Clearly, this is an area that deserves theoretical and research attention.

This investigation examined the relationship between teacher beliefs and behavior regarding pupil control, on the one hand, and the extent to which students found classroom life robust or dramatic, on the other hand. The study is part of a line of inquiry on schools as social organizations and the part played by pupil control in such organizations (2,3).

An unexpected side result of one of our past studies was that students in a highly traditional school had more positive attitudes towards their everyday classroom lives than were held by students in an open, permissive school (4).

These unanticipated findings called for explanation. A plausible conjecture, put in the simplest terms, was that strict discipline adds an element of drama to student life (5). This conjecture was "after-the-facts;" hence, prior hypotheses were formulated which could be tested empirically.

Hypotheses

In our past studies, both teacher pupil control ideology (PCI) and pupil control behavior (PCB) have been conceptualized on a continuum that ranged from humanistic or permissive at one end to custodial or strict at the other end. Our conjecture was that strict discipline makes for a robust environment for students. It would seem that teachers who are very custodial would have relatively high levels of conflict with students, conflict that ordinarily would occur before a student audience. Such conflict is likely to evoke empathic role-taking on the part of the members of the audience, as would the punishment of a student for misconduct. This kind of role-taking has been labeled the ripple effect in discipline by Kounin and Gump (6), and it brings to mind Durkheim's (7) comment that the punishment of a crime has more important societal effects on the innocent than on the criminal. In any case, student identification with classmates who are "in trouble" enhances the drama already produced by teacher-student conflict. Since the classrooms of teachers who are relatively custodial in their pupil control beliefs and behavior would appear to be more likely locations of teacher-student conflict and the drama or robustness it confers than would the classrooms of teachers who are more humanistic in PCI and PCB, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H.1. There will be a direct relationship between teacher custodialism in PCI and student reports of high classroom robustness.

H.2. There will be a direct relationship between teacher custodialism in PCB and student reports of high classroom robustness.

Methods

Measures

In order to test these hypotheses, operational definitions were required for three variables: teacher PCI, teacher PCB, and classroom robustness. In each case, paper and pencil instruments were used as measures. The PCI form and the PCB form respectively served as operational definitions of the first two variables, while the Robustness Semantic Differential (RSD) Scale was used to tap student perceptions of classroom environmental robustness.

Both the PCI and the PCB forms are 20-item Likert-type devices based on the humanistic-custodial continuum noted previously. Both instruments utilize 5-point response scales and have scoring ranges from 20 to 100. Higher scores represent more custodial ideology or behavior.

Examples of PCI form items are "beginning teachers are not likely to maintain strict enough control over their pupils" and "pupils can be trusted to work together without supervision." Responses are made in a strongly agree to strongly disagree format. Corrected split-half reliabilities of .91 and .95 were reported for the PCI form, and it was found to discriminate between teachers and schools judged to be humanistic or custodial. More complete information can be found in Willower, Eidell and Hoy (8).

The PCB form is completed by students concerning their teachers so that a teacher's PCB form score is the mean of the scores of that teacher's students. Examples of items, preceded by the words "my teacher" are "gets upset if students are noisy" and "smiles when students are around." Responses are made in an always to never format. PCB reliability as estimated by Cronbach's alpha was .92. Item-scale correlations averaged .81, and a one-way analysis of variance indicated that the instrument differentiated among

subjects while clustering within them. Details are presented in Helsel and Willower (9).

The RSD Scale was developed using the semantic differential techniques of Osgood and his associates (10). A robust environment was defined as one having high dramatic content. Twenty-five pairs of polar adjectives thought to discriminate high drama were presented to a sample of 120 elementary and 196 secondary school students who responded to the concepts "dramatic" and "not dramatic." A principal components analysis based on responses to the concept "dramatic" identified one principal factor. On the basis of this analysis and of the ability of the adjective pairs to discriminate between the concepts "dramatic" and "not dramatic" as determined by correlated t-tests, the following four adjective pairs were used to measure classroom environmental robustness: exciting-calming, weak-powerful, interesting-boring, and no action-full of action. Since a 7-point response scale was employed, the scoring range was from 4 to 28, with a higher score indicating higher robustness. Work to refine this instrument is continuing. For particulars see Licata, Willower and Ellett (11).

The PCI form was to be completed by the teachers in the sample. The PCB form was to be completed by students on their teacher, providing a mean PCB form score for each teacher, and the RSD Scale was to be completed by students for the concept "my classroom."

Sample

The sample consisted of the fourth, fifth and sixth grade teachers and their students in five elementary schools in a single school district in the northeastern United States. Geographically, the district encompassed a small city and its rural surroundings.

All but one of the district's 33 fourth through sixth grade teachers agreed to participate in the study. Some of the 803 students in these teachers' classes did not participate because of lack of parental consent or because of absence. Some others provided unusable returns.

Analyses were based on data supplied by 32 teachers and from 783 to 797 students depending on the forms or combinations being used. However, the classroom was the basic unit of analysis. Class size ranged from 18 to 29, and averaged about 25.

Results

Hypothesis one posited a direct relationship between custodialism in teacher PCI and classroom environmental robustness. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between the PCI scores of the 32 teachers and the robustness scores for each of their classrooms was -.07 which was not significant. Hence, this hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis two proposed a direct relationship between custodialism in teacher PCB and classroom environmental robustness. The correlation between the PCB scores of each of the 32 teachers and the RSD scores for each of the classrooms was -.64. When the effect of PCI was partialled out, the strength of the partial correlation remained virtually the same as the zero order correlation. A correlation of this magnitude is significant beyond the .001 level. However, the minus sign of the correlation means that as humanism in teacher PCB increases, robustness increases. Thus, hypothesis two must be rejected. The relationship between the variables is inverse rather than direct, the opposite of the prediction made.

The mean PCI score for the 32 teachers was 52.1 with a standard deviation of 9.0; their mean PCB score was 52.4 with a standard deviation

of 6.2; and the mean robustness score for the 32 classrooms was 21.0 with a standard deviation of 2.1.

Selected data from some of the additional analyzes that were carried out are presented next. More complete information can be found in a larger document (12).

Taking the student as the unit of analysis, correlations were computed by grade level between student attributions of teacher PCB and student robustness scores. For the 259 fourth graders, the correlation was -.49; for the 266 fifth graders, it was -.44; and for the 258 sixth graders, it was -.52. For the overall group, the r was -.49; all relationships were significant beyond the .001 level, and there was consistency among grade levels, each exhibiting an association between student perceptions of teacher humanism in PCB and student reports of high classroom robustness.

Separate correlations were computed between teacher PCB and each of the polar adjectives comprising the RSD Scale. For the sample of 32 teachers and classrooms, the coefficients were -.44 for exciting-calming, -.38 for weak-powerful, -.66 for interesting-boring, and -.70 for no action-full of action. The stronger relationships were exhibited for the adjectives that suggested activity and interst.

Some striking differences emerged when data for the 17 female and 15 male teachers in the sample were analyzed separately. Recall that the correlation between teacher PCI and classroom environmental robustness was a low -.07 for the overall sample. However, for the 17 female teachers and their classes, it was -.51, and for the 15 male teachers and their classes it was .70. These relationships were significant at the .05 and .01 levels respectively.

The correlation between teacher PCB and classroom robustness was -.64 for the entire sample, but it was a non-significant -.24 for the male teachers and a highly significant -.80 for the females. In addition, it should be noted that the correlation between PCI and PCB which was .21 for all of the teachers, was -.10 for the males and .39 for the females.

Finally, the male teachers were somewhat more custodial in PCI than the female teachers. The difference in their respective mean scores of 55.0 and 49.5 approached significance (p=.08). However, PCB and RSD means for the male and female teachers were quite similar.

Discussion

This inquiry began with the conjectures that custodialism in teacher pupil control ideology and behavior would be associated with high classroom drama or environmental robustness for students. These conjectures were not supported.

In fact, for the present sample at least, custodialism in teacher PCB is inversely related to robustness. It is humanistic teacher PCB that is associated with student reports of high classroom robustness. This is a solid finding for the overall sample, and it is very pronounced for female teachers, but much less so for male teachers. In fact, results differ for male and female teachers in several areas.

When the sample of teachers is dichotomized by sex, the subsample numbers are small. Obviously, some of the relationships and differences examined might have been affected by sampling or measurement error. This caution should be kept in mind, but the results will be taken at face value for purposes of the present discussion.

Our main finding, the relationship between humanistic teacher behavior and classroom robustness, probably is not surprising to most observers. We

were intrigued by the implications of one of our earlier studies, and spun a theoretical web that apparently led us astray. In any case, it is reasonable that the classrooms of teachers who exhibit more humanistic PCB should be reported by students to be more full of action, interesting, exciting and powerful than the classrooms of more custodial teachers. This also seems consistent with the results of research that reported a relationship between student perceptions of humanistic teacher behavior and positive student attitudes toward school (13). However, the study was of secondary school students, so its application to the current research is somewhat limited.

In pupil control terms, the classrooms of relatively custodial teachers may be high in routines and rules, making for a predictable environment for students, but one that is dull and lacking in drama. It is also possible that teacher-student conflict is not, as we surmised, greater in the classrooms of teachers who behave custodially. Perhaps the leeway afforded students by humanistic teachers often leads to disorder and a higher level of conflict than is found in a more custodial classroom. Moreover, students might be reluctant to risk conflicts with custodial teachers. Hence, overt conflicts that take place in front of student audiences would be reduced in such classrooms. However, one of the simplest explanations is that active, interesting classrooms don't require strict control. In this case, teacher PCB would be seen as a dependent variable.

Next, we turn to the rather puzzling differences related to teacher sex. Little more need be said regarding the PCB-robustness relationship. It is stronger for females than males, but it is in the same direction for both, and with a larger sample it would likely be significant for males as well as females. Of course, if the correlations for larger samples

were to remain at about the same magnitudes as the current ones, the variances accounted for in the samples of male and female teachers would differ substantially. At any rate, the PCB-robustness pattern is consistent for male and female teachers.

The PCI-robustness relationship is quite a different matter. Findings for the two groups contrast sharply. The male teachers are somewhat more custodial in PCI than their female colleagues, but the major difference is that for the male teachers, custodialism in PCI is associated with classroom robustness, while for the females, humanism in PCI is associated with robustness.

These results, taken together with those on PCB indicate that for the female teachers ideology and behavior mesh comparatively well; humanism in each is associated with classroom robustness. However, the male teachers exhibit inconsistencies. There is no relationship between their ideology and behavior, and custodialism in ideology, and to a degree, humanism in behavior, are associated with robustness. This association between custodialism in PCI and robustness for male teachers, given their PCB, is not easily explained. It might have something to do with student expectations of male teachers. It might arise from something which is associated with a custodial PCI, but which is unrelated to controlling behavior.

The general pattern of inconsistency for male teachers in the elementary school could reflect the efforts of male teachers to adapt in a setting that is predominately female. The male teachers' more custodial beliefs might stem at least partly from the male societal role, one that is less oriented toward nurturing than the female role. At the same time, the male teachers' control behavior, more in line with that of their female counterparts, could

be attributed to norms in the colleague group and the nature of the teaching task in the elementary school.

Interestingly, there are some studies which suggest the possibility that, in secondary schools, it is the female teachers who exhibit less consistency than their male associates (14,15). A plausible explanation is that just given, but turned around to fit the circumstances of the female teacher in the predominately male secondary school setting. Obviously, these are speculations that call for careful empirical examination.

In any case, our conjectures concerning teacher sex should not obscure our central finding. In the present inquiry, we have found, contrary to our theoretical expectations, that there is a direct relationship between humanistic pupil control behavior on the part of teachers and the level of classroom environmental robustness reported by students.

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